DOCTOR
STRANGE
#13
AARON
BACHALO
FABELA
TARTAGLIA
MARVEL

STEPHEN STRANGE was a preeminent surgeon until a car accident damaged the nerves in his hands. His ego drove him to scour the globe for a miracle cure, but instead he found a mysterious wizard called the ANCIENT ONE who taught him magic and that there are things in this world bigger than himself. These lessons led Stephen to become the Sorcerer Supreme, Earth's first defense against all manner of magical threats. His patients call him...

DOCTOR STRANGE

With the state of magic almost all destroyed by the EMPIRIKUL, Doctor Strange is at his weakest. Relying on a few mystical weapons and even fewer spells, Stephen was forced to confront his old adversary, a fully-powered Baron Mordo. But before Mordo could finish him off, Stephen found himself teleported to the realm of another nemesis...NIGHTMARE.

BLOOD IN THE AETHER

CHAPTER TWO: NIGHT OF FOUR BILLION NIGHTMARES

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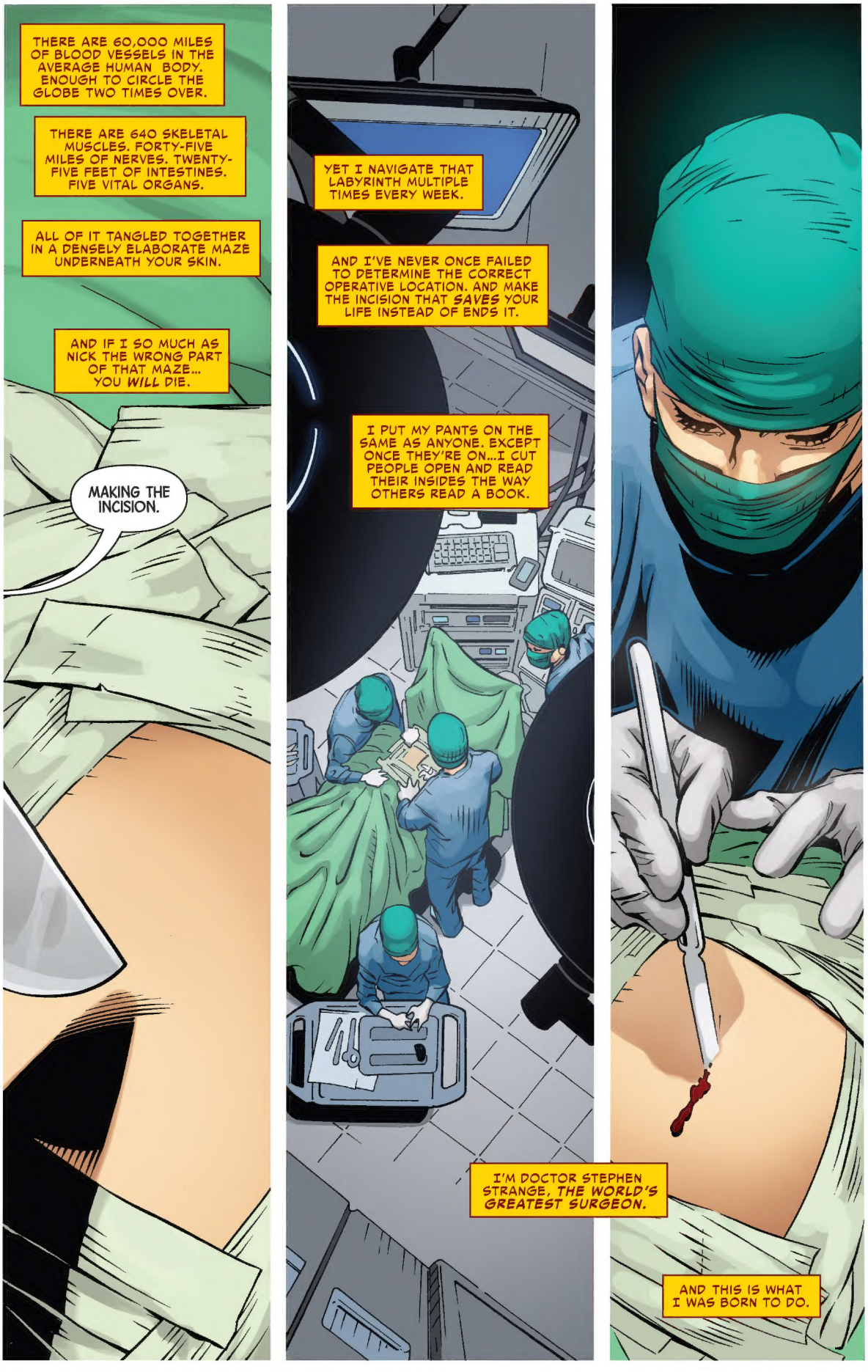
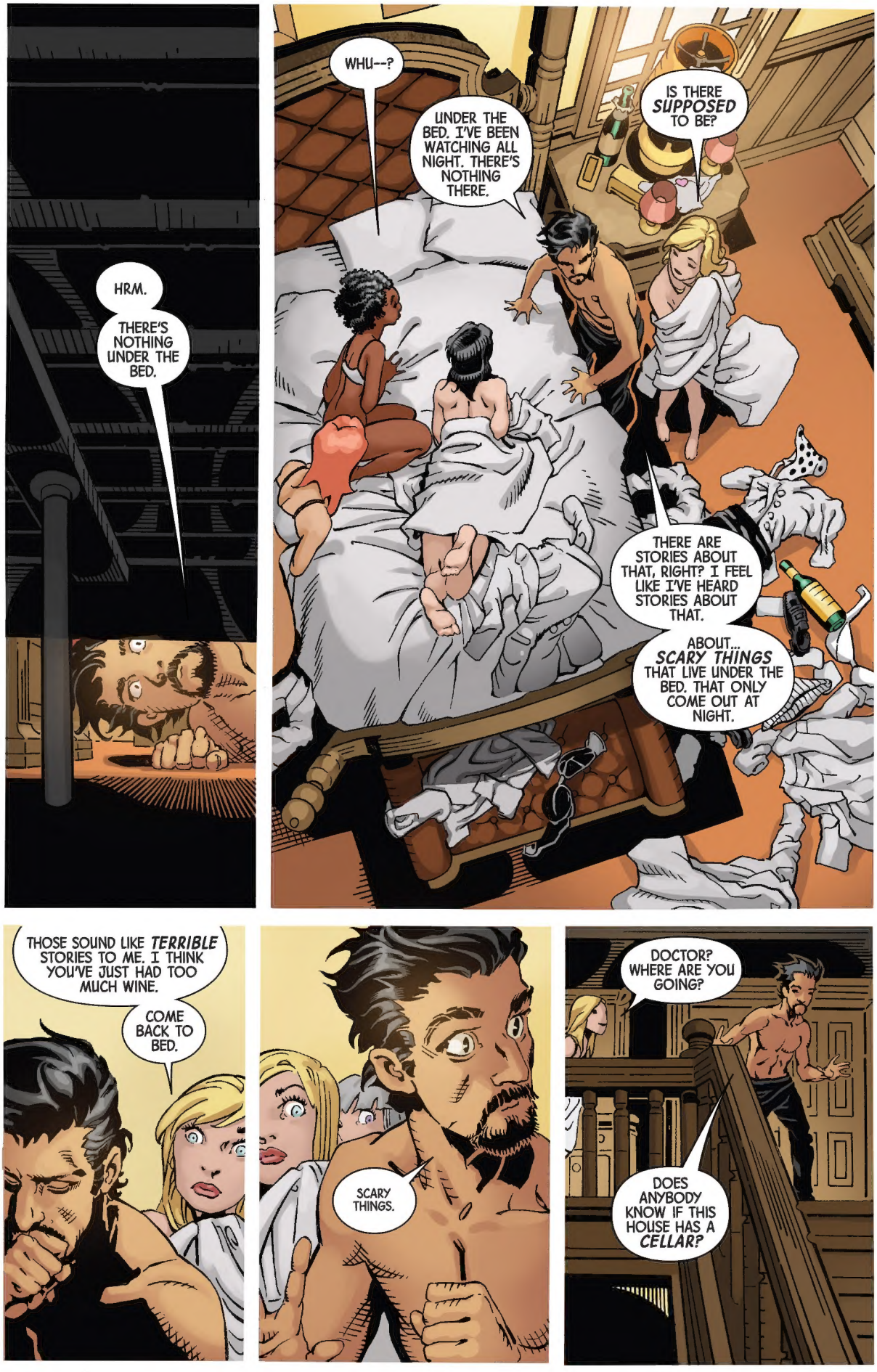
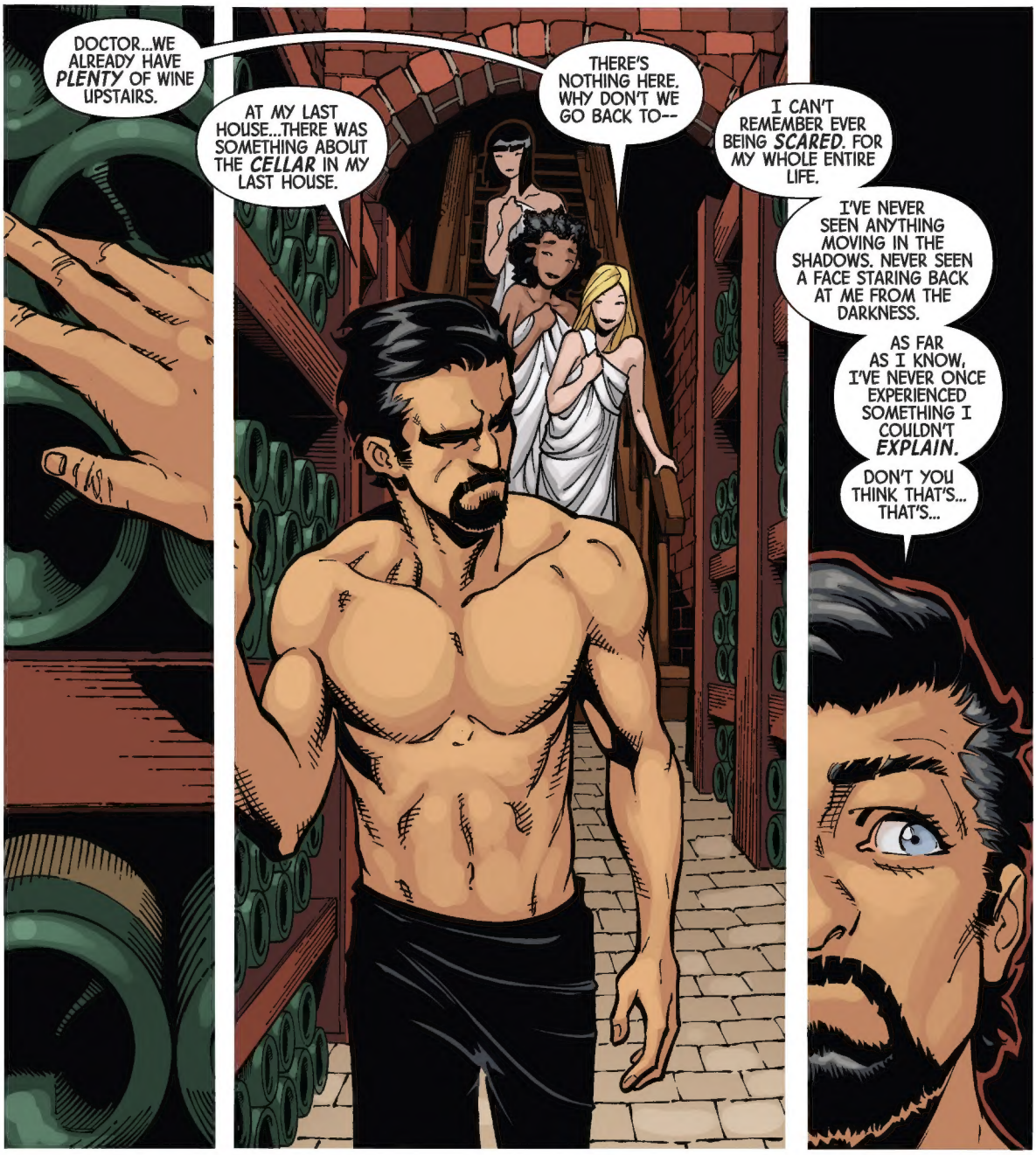

THERE ARE 60,000 MILES OF BLOOD VESSELS IN THE AVERAGE HUMAN BODY. ENOUGH TO CIRCLE THE GLOBE TWO TIMES OVER.
THERE ARE 640 SKELETAL MUSCLES. FORTY-FIVE MILES OF NERVES. TWENTY-FIVE FEET OF INTESTINES. FIVE VITAL ORGANS.
ALL OF IT TANGLED TOGETHER IN A DENSELY ELABORATE MAZE UNDERNEATH YOUR SKIN.
AND IF I SO MUCH AS NICK THE WRONG PART OF THAT MAZE... YOU WILL DIE.
MAKING THE INCISION.
YET I NAVIGATE THAT LABYRINTH MULTIPLE TIMES EVERY WEEK.
AND I'VE NEVER ONCE FAILED TO DETERMINE THE CORRECT OPERATIVE LOCATION. AND MAKE THE INCISION THAT SAVES YOUR LIFE INSTEAD OF ENDS IT.
I PUT MY PANTS ON THE SAME AS ANYONE. EXCEPT ONCE THEY'RE ON...I CUT PEOPLE OPEN AND READ THEIR INSIDES THE WAY OTHERS READ A BOOK.
I'M DOCTOR STEPHEN STRANGE, THE WORLD'S GREATEST SURGEON.
AND THIS IS WHAT I WAS BORN TO DO.

FASTER!
FUNNY. I WAS JUST THINKING THE VERY SAME THING.
OH MY GOD, DOCTOR! THIS IS YOUR HOUSE?
IT'S BIGGER THAN THE HOSPITAL.
HOW MANY BEDROOMS DOES THIS THING HAVE?
I HAVE NO IDEA.
LET'S FIND OUT TOGETHER.


HRM.
THERE'S NOTHING UNDER THE BED.
WHU--?
UNDER THE BED. I'VE BEEN WATCHING ALL NIGHT. THERE'S NOTHING THERE.
IS THERE SUPPOSED TO BE?
THERE ARE STORIES ABOUT THAT, RIGHT? I FEEL LIKE I'VE HEARD STORIES ABOUT THAT.
ABOUT... SCARY THINGS THAT LIVE UNDER THE BED. THAT ONLY COME OUT AT NIGHT.
THOSE SOUND LIKE TERRIBLE STORIES TO ME. I THINK YOU'VE JUST HAD TOO MUCH WINE.
COME BACK TO BED.
SCARY THINGS.
DOCTOR? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
DOES ANYBODY KNOW IF THIS HOUSE HAS A CELLAR?


DOCTOR...WE ALREADY HAVE *PLENTY* OF WINE UPSTAIRS.
AT MY LAST HOUSE...THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE *CELLAR* IN MY LAST HOUSE.
THERE'S NOTHING HERE. WHY DON'T WE GO BACK TO--
I CAN'T REMEMBER EVER BEING *SCARED*. FOR MY WHOLE ENTIRE LIFE.
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING MOVING IN THE SHADOWS. NEVER SEEN A FACE STARING BACK AT ME FROM THE DARKNESS.
AS FAR AS I KNOW, I'VE NEVER ONCE EXPERIENCED SOMETHING I COULDN'T *EXPLAIN*.
DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S... THAT'S...

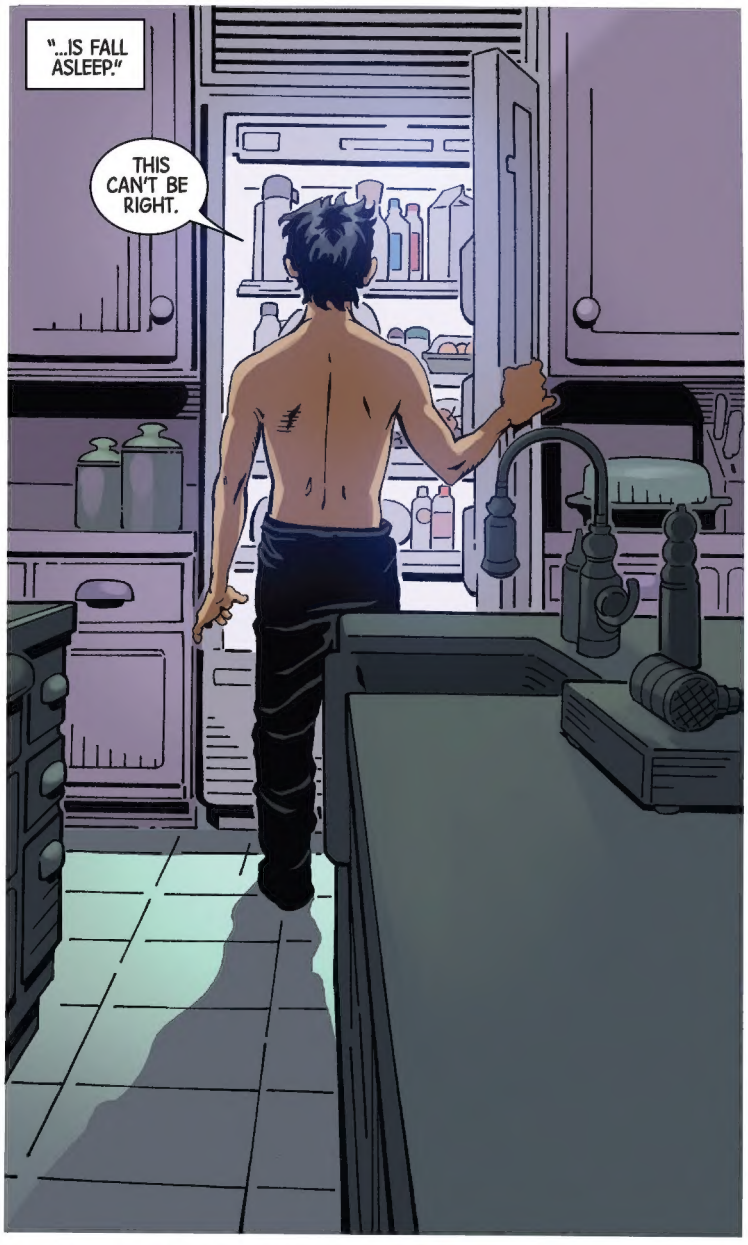
WHY CAN'T I THINK OF A WORD THAT MEANS THE *OPPOSITE* OF NORMAL? THOSE WORDS DO EXIST, DON'T THEY?
DOCTOR, COME BACK TO BED.

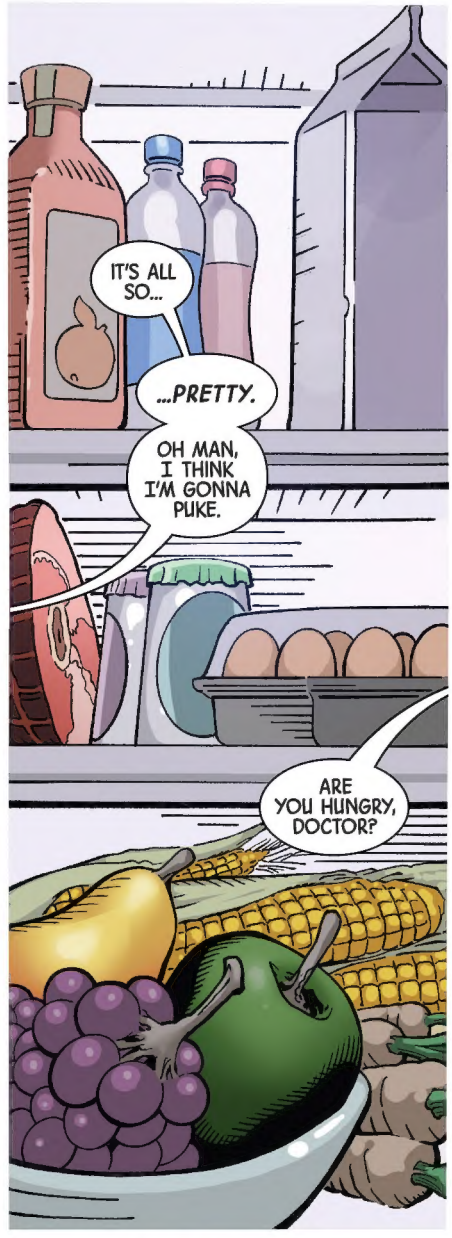
IT'S JUST A CELLAR. THERE'S NOTHING HERE TO BE AFRAID OF.
I KNOW.
THAT'S WHAT I'M AFRAID OF.

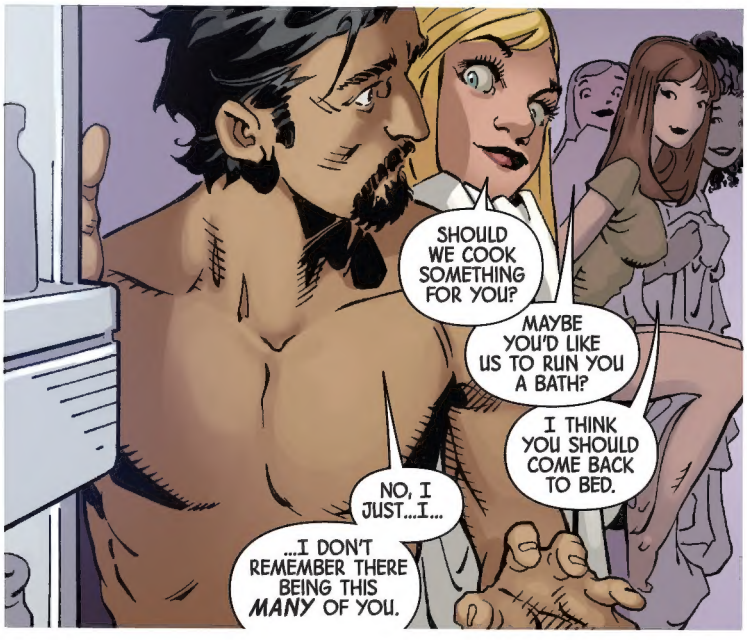
NO!!!!
STRANGE WAS MINE! THAT WAS MY SCALP TO CLAIM!
DAMN YOU, YOU PASTY-FACED--
I WARNED YOU.

I TOLD YOU THERE WAS BLOOD IN THE AETHER, THAT THEY ALL WERE COMING.
AND YOU STILL LET THE PRIZE SLIP AWAY, YOU TINY LITTLE RODENT OF A MAN.

STRANGE WILL DIE AT MY HANDS. NO ONE ELSE'S. THIS I SWEAR.
YES, YOU DO LOVE TO SWEAR, DON'T YOU, MORDO? YOU'RE QUITE ADEPT AT SWEARING OATHS.
JUST NOT AT KEEPING THEM.
UNLIKE YOU, I KEEP MY PROMISES.
EITHER STRANGE DIES BY YOUR HAND...
...OR YOU BURN AT THE FEET OF THE DREAD DORMAMMU.
I HEARD YOU THE FIRST HUNDRED TIMES!
WHAT'S HAPPENING? WAS HE JUST TALKING TO THOSE RATS? WHERE'S MORDO GOING? WHERE'S THE DOC?
LAST I SAW, DOCTOR STRANGE WAS MELTING INTO A PUDDLE, AND THEN...
WONG. DID BARON MORDO JUST MURDER DOCTOR STRANGE?
IF HE WERE DEAD, THE HOUSE WOULD KNOW IT. AND SO WOULD I.
HE'S BEEN TAKEN.
BUT NOT BY MORDO.
THEN BY WHOM? AND HOW DO WE GET HIM BACK?
IF MY SUSPICIONS ARE CORRECT, WE MUST ACT QUICKLY. THE FIRST THING WE HAVE TO DO, ZELMA STANTON, AS FAST AS WE POSSIBLY CAN...


"...IS FALL ASLEEP."
THIS CAN'T BE RIGHT.

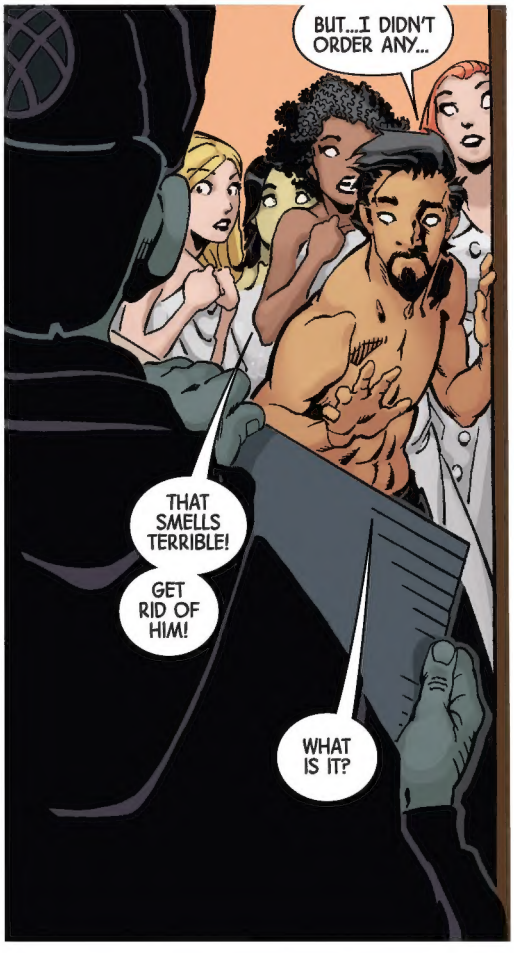

IT'S ALL SO...
...PRETTY.
OH MAN, I THINK I'M GONNA PUKE.
ARE YOU HUNGRY, DOCTOR?


SHOULD WE COOK SOMETHING FOR YOU?
MAYBE YOU'D LIKE US TO RUN YOU A BATH?
I THINK YOU SHOULD COME BACK TO BED.
NO, I JUST...I...
...I DON'T REMEMBER THERE BEING THIS MANY OF YOU.

WHY DON'T YOU COME BACK TO BED, DOCTOR?
BONG

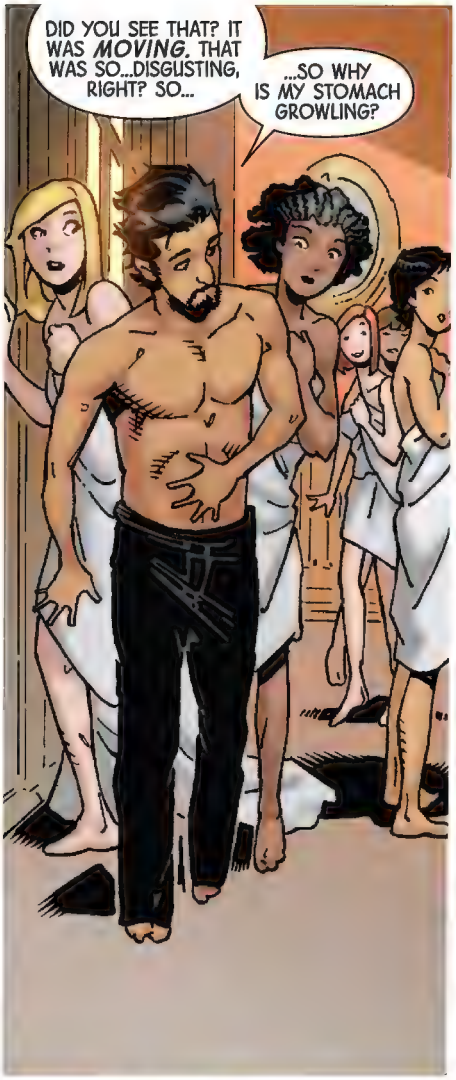
THAT'S THE DOORBELL. WHO COULD BE--
LET US ANSWER IT FOR YOU!
NO, IT'S MY HOUSE. I'LL...

DELIVERY FOR DOCTOR STRANGE.


BUT...I DIDN'T ORDER ANY...
THAT SMELLS TERRIBLE!
GET RID OF HIM!
WHAT IS IT?

YOUR FAVORITE.
AAAAGGGHHH!!!

CHOOM


DID YOU SEE THAT? IT WAS MOVING. THAT WAS SO...DISGUSTING, RIGHT? SO...
...SO WHY IS MY STOMACH GROWLING?

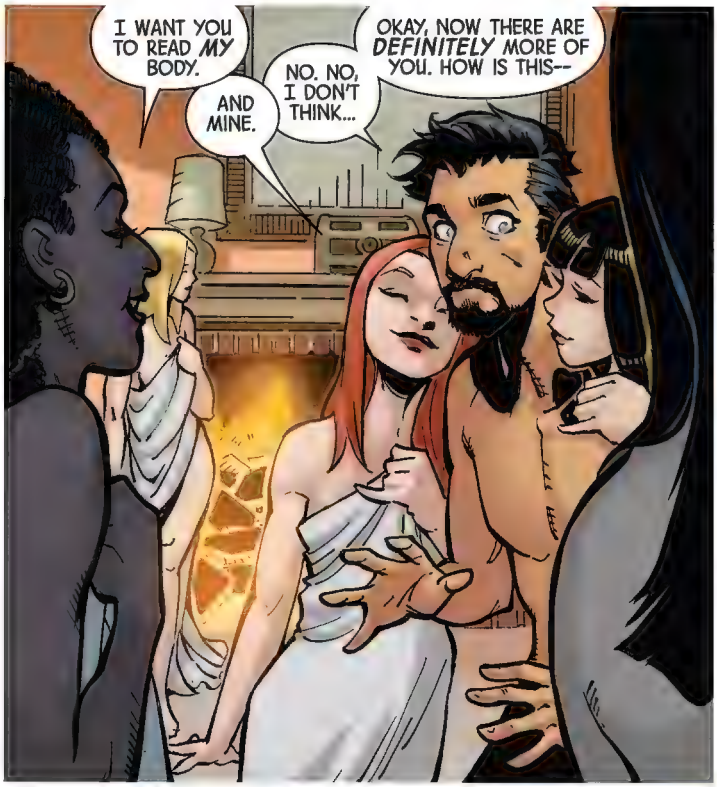
THUNK

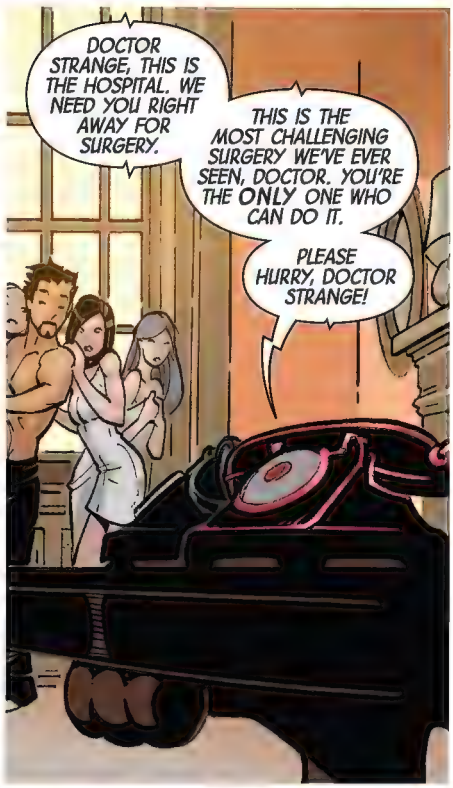
...
THERE ARE BOOKS FALLING DOWN MY CHIMNEY.
WHAT ARE THOSE WORDS? I CAN'T EVEN READ SOME OF THOSE...

MERRY CHRISTMAS, DOCTOR STRANGE!
TIME TO WAKE YOUR WEIRD ASS UP!

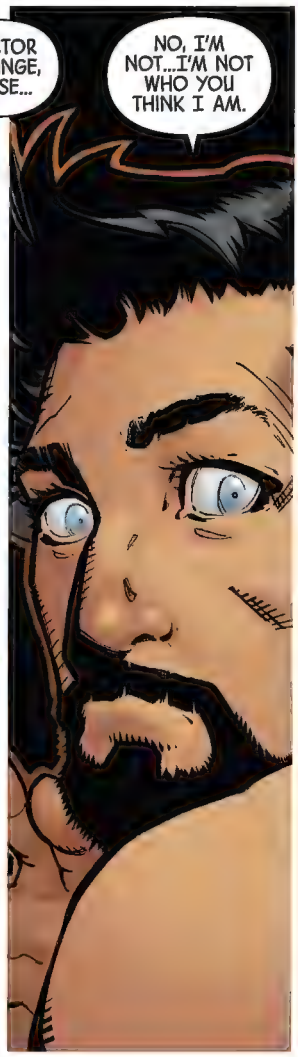
READING IS FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW ANYTHING.

NO!
DOCTOR STRANGE DOESN'T READ BOOKS.
HE READS BODIES.


I WANT YOU TO READ MY BODY.
AND MINE.
NO. NO, I DON'T THINK...
OKAY, NOW THERE ARE DEFINITELY MORE OF YOU. HOW IS THIS--

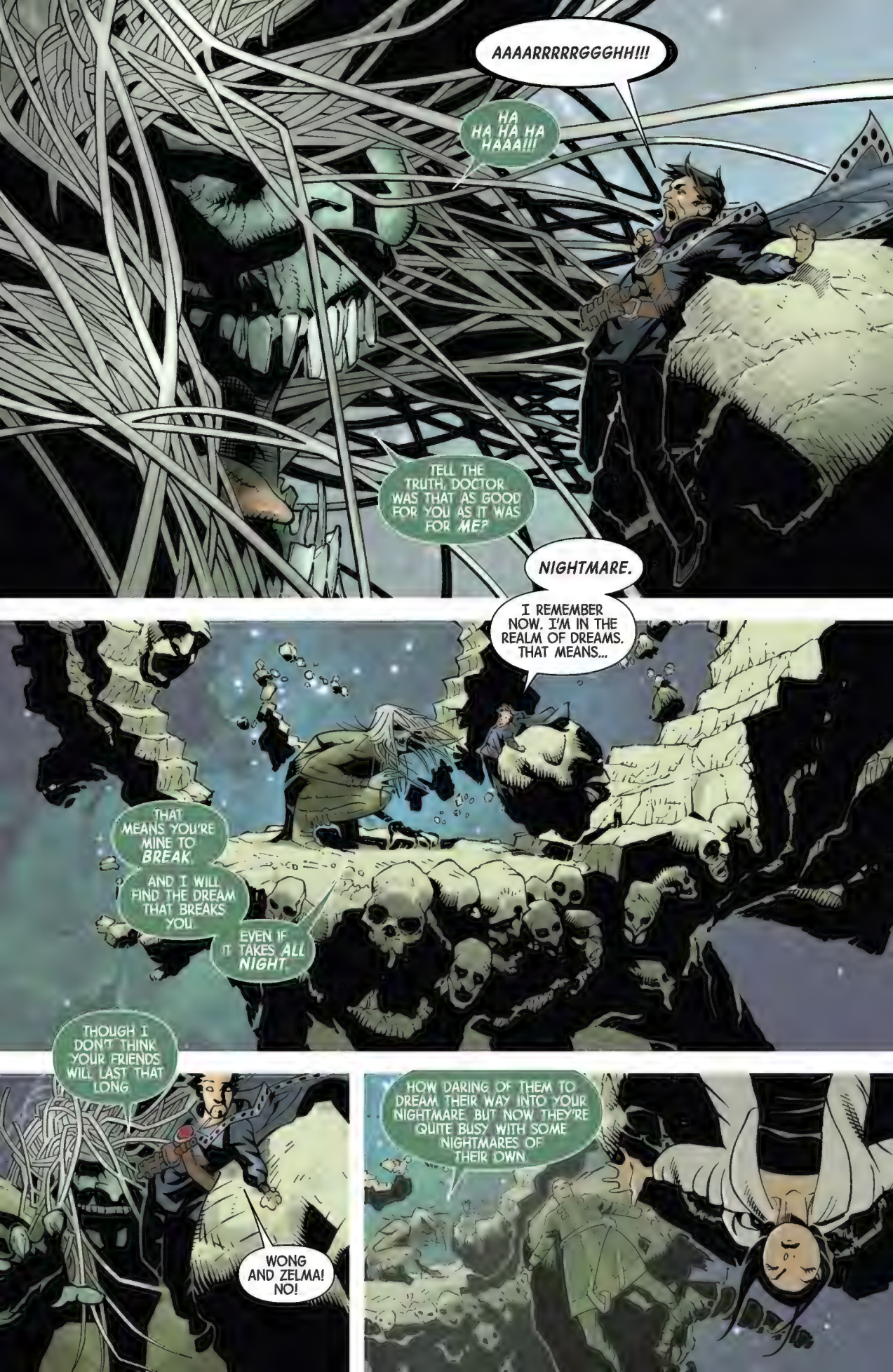

DOCTOR STRANGE, THIS IS THE HOSPITAL. WE NEED YOU RIGHT AWAY FOR SURGERY.
THIS IS THE MOST CHALLENGING SURGERY WE'VE EVER SEEN, DOCTOR. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DO IT.
PLEASE HURRY, DOCTOR STRANGE!

SURGERY. I CAN'T DO SURGERY.
DOCTOR STRANGE, PLEASE...


NO, I'M NOT...I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM.

I'M NOT WHO I THINK I AM.

DOCTOR STRANGE...
NO!
GET AWAY FROM ME!
COME TO BED.
GO TO SURGERY.
LET'S TAKE A DRIVE.
MY HANDS. THERE'S SUPPOSED TO BE SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY HANDS. I SHOULDN'T EVEN BE ABLE TO HOLD THIS...
DON'T BE AFRAID, DOCTOR. THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR HERE.
THIS IS EVERYTHING YOU'VE EVER DREAMED OF.
NO. THIS ISN'T MY DREAM. NOT ANYMORE.
THIS IS A NIGHTMARE.
HUNK

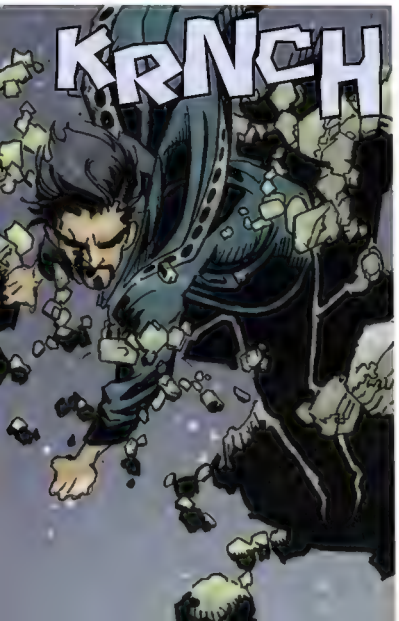

AAAARRRRRGGGHH!!!
HA HA HA HA HAAA!!!
TELL THE TRUTH, DOCTOR. WAS THAT AS GOOD FOR YOU AS IT WAS FOR ME?
NIGHTMARE.
I REMEMBER NOW. I'M IN THE REALM OF DREAMS. THAT MEANS...
THAT MEANS YOU'RE MINE TO BREAK.
AND I WILL FIND THE DREAM THAT BREAKS YOU.
EVEN IF IT TAKES ALL NIGHT.
THOUGH I DON'T THINK YOUR FRIENDS WILL LAST THAT LONG.
WONG AND ZELMA! NO!
HOW DARING OF THEM TO DREAM THEIR WAY INTO YOUR NIGHTMARE. BUT NOW THEY'RE QUITE BUSY WITH SOME NIGHTMARES OF THEIR OWN.

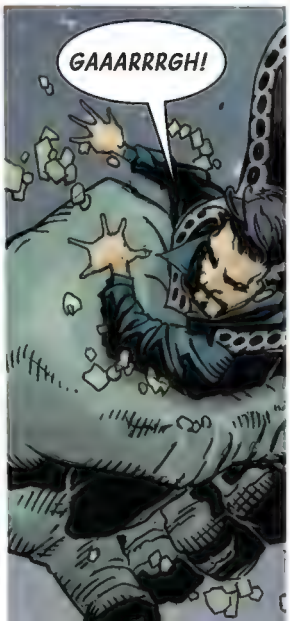
"MAYBE THE *OLD* YOU COULD'VE SAVED THEM, DOCTOR, BEFORE THEY'RE LOST FOREVER INSIDE THEIR OWN SUBCONSCIOUS.

"THEIR MINDS TORN APART BY THEIR DEEPEST, DARKEST, MOST SUCCULENT LITTLE FEARS. BUT LET'S FACE IT, STRANGE...

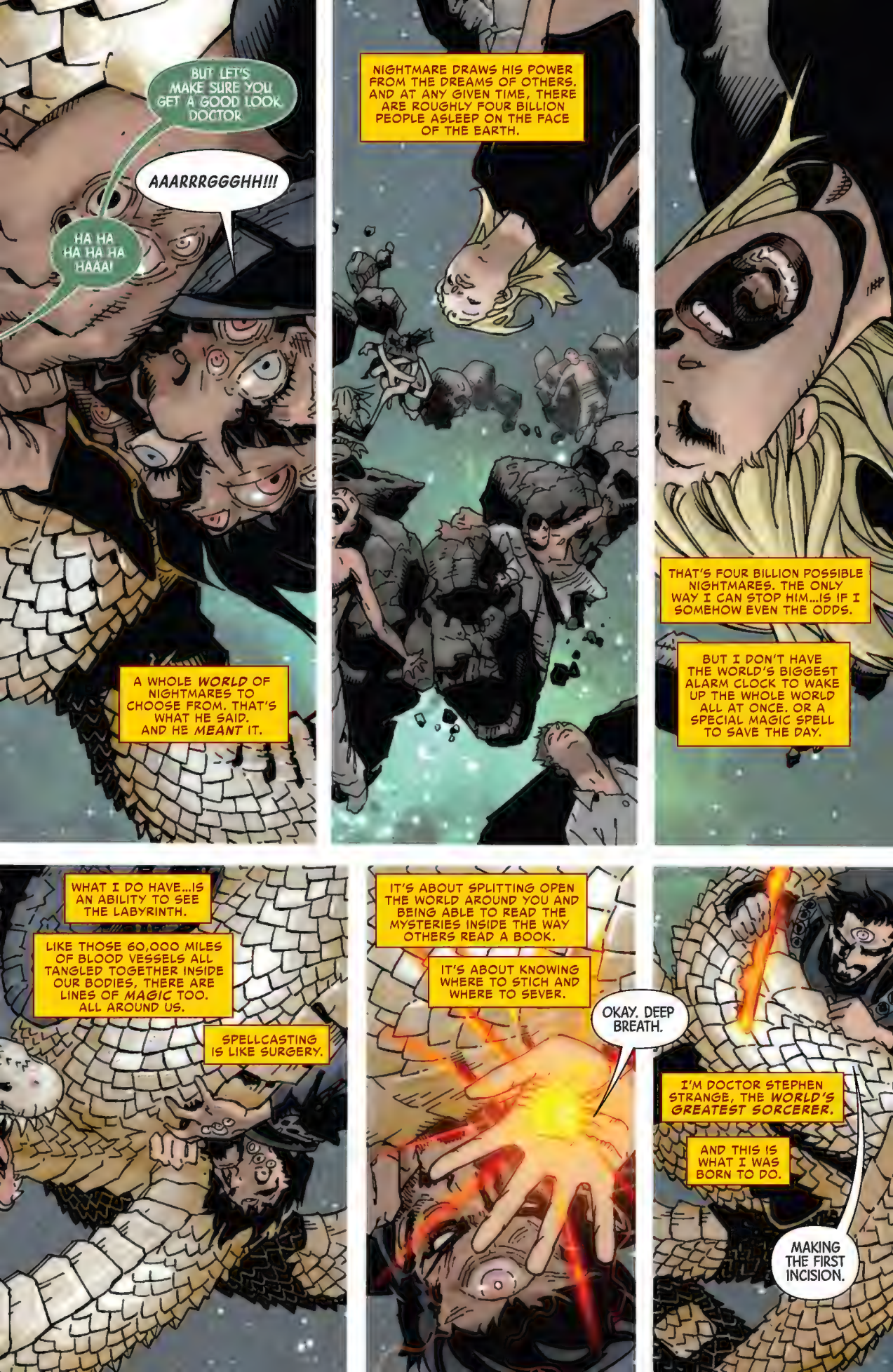
"...YOU'RE NOT THE MAN YOU ONCE WERE.

"NOT EVEN IN YOUR WILDEST DREAMS."





WATCHING YOUR FRIENDS *SUFFER* WHILE YOU'RE COMPLETELY HELPLESS TO STOP IT
TELL ME, WHICH MIND DO YOU THINK WILL BREAK FIRST? YOURS OR THEIRS?
OH, THE SUSPENSE IS SO MUCH, I ALMOST CAN'T WATCH


BUT LET'S MAKE SURE YOU GET A GOOD LOOK, DOCTOR
AAARRRGGGHH!!!
HA HA HA HA HA HAAA!
A WHOLE WORLD OF NIGHTMARES TO CHOOSE FROM. THAT'S WHAT HE SAID. AND HE MEANT IT.
NIGHTMARE DRAWS HIS POWER FROM THE DREAMS OF OTHERS. AND AT ANY GIVEN TIME, THERE ARE ROUGHLY FOUR BILLION PEOPLE ASLEEP ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH.
THAT'S FOUR BILLION POSSIBLE NIGHTMARES. THE ONLY WAY I CAN STOP HIM...IS IF I SOMEHOW EVEN THE ODDS.
BUT I DON'T HAVE THE WORLD'S BIGGEST ALARM CLOCK TO WAKE UP THE WHOLE WORLD ALL AT ONCE. OR A SPECIAL MAGIC SPELL TO SAVE THE DAY.
WHAT I DO HAVE...IS AN ABILITY TO SEE THE LABYRINTH.
LIKE THOSE 60,000 MILES OF BLOOD VESSELS ALL TANGLED TOGETHER INSIDE OUR BODIES, THERE ARE LINES OF MAGIC TOO. ALL AROUND US.
SPELLCASTING IS LIKE SURGERY.
IT'S ABOUT SPLITTING OPEN THE WORLD AROUND YOU AND BEING ABLE TO READ THE MYSTERIES INSIDE THE WAY OTHERS READ A BOOK.
IT'S ABOUT KNOWING WHERE TO STICH AND WHERE TO SEVER.
OKAY. DEEP BREATH.
I'M DOCTOR STEPHEN STRANGE, THE WORLD'S GREATEST SORCERER.
AND THIS IS WHAT I WAS BORN TO DO.
MAKING THE FIRST INCISION.

WHAT? WHERE DID HE
I JUST WROTE A NEW SPELL.
AS OF RIGHT NOW, THERE ARE NO LONGER FOUR BILLION PEOPLE DREAMING ON THE PLANET EARTH.
THERE'S JUST ONE.
LUCKY OLD ME.
CLOWNS. OF COURSE.
THERE'S GONNA BE LOTS OF CLOWNS, ISN'T THERE?
I JUST STOLE FOUR BILLION NIGHTMARES.
NOW ALL I'VE GOT TO DO IS SURVIVE THEM.

NO. NO. WHAT
...WHAT JUST HAPPENED? WHAT DID HE...
WHAT DID I DO? OH, NOT MUCH.
I JUST GAVE THE ENTIRE WORLD A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.
AND LIVED TO TELL ABOUT IT.
I KNOW. I'M PRETTY IMPRESSED WITH ME TOO.
NO!!!
WHY YES, I WILL TAKE ANOTHER CUPCAKE, CAPTAIN SPRINKLES.
DOCTOR STRANGE WINS AGAIN.

NOW, LET'S TALK ABOUT *YOUR* WORST FEARS FOR A CHANGE, NIGHTY.
VITAMIN D? CLOTHES THAT AREN'T A ONE-PIECE JUMPSUIT? POINTY SHOES GOING OUT OF STYLE?
WHAT'S THIS? ANOTHER OF YOUR TRICKS? I THOUGHT WE WERE...
NO, THAT ISN'T MINE.
THEN WHAT'S--
GAAAGGGH!!
WHA--!
WHAT JUST...
I'D ORDER SOMETHING PRETTY QUICKLY IF I WERE YOU.
DEVI
FAVORI
DAUGHT

SERVICE AROUND HERE HAS REALLY GONE TO *HELL*.
HELL'S KITCHEN
THE WEE HOURS OF WEDNESDAY.
SATANA, THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER.
TO BE CONTINUED...

NEXT ISSUE: DINNER'S SERVED!

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